

Got Gelt? A Conversation about Giving in this Season of Receiving

AGE

Middle School; can be adapted for other ages

TIME

45 minutes

INTRODUCTION

Got Gelt? A Conversation about Giving in this Season of Receiving will help students think about and articulate how they decide where to give *tzedakah*. Using an interactive game, debate and Jewish text, this lesson highlights the complexity of allocating *tzedakah* and the necessity of making difficult decisions among competing priorities. *Got Gelt?* also includes an at-home component that enables students to apply their learning to actual giving as they and their families designate a night of Chanukah to give *tzedakah*. *Got Gelt?* lays the groundwork for students and their families to participate in [Where Do You Give? Reimagining Tzedakah for the 21st Century](http://www.wheredoyougive.org), an initiative featuring a national design competition, online interactive media and educational resources that engages the Jewish community in critical questions about where we give, to whom and why.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will view themselves as philanthropists.
- Students will understand that the act of giving *tzedakah* is complex and involves making tough decisions among competing priorities.
- Students will begin to articulate how they make decisions about where to give *tzedakah*.
- Students will commit to designating one night of Chanukah for discussing and giving *tzedakah* with their families.

MATERIALS

- “Would You Rather?” questions (provided below)
- Chart paper/whiteboard
- Markers
- Letter to families (www.wheredoyougive.org/students_and_teachers/got_gelt_family_letter)

LESSON PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONNECTION TO CHANUKAH (5 MINUTES)

- Invite students to play a short word association game in which you say a word and they write down the first three things that come to mind. Say, “Chanukah,” and ask students to write and then share their responses. (Alternative: Stand in a circle and go around the circle having each student say only one word in response to “Chanukah.”)
- Assuming that some students say “gifts” or “presents,” acknowledge that, particularly in our generation, Chanukah has come to be associated with gift-giving. Explain to students that there is a growing trend to dedicate at least one night of Chanukah to giving, rather than receiving. Indicate that this session will help them participate in that trend and will connect them to a national conversation about *tzedakah* called *Where Do You Give?* Share the *Where Do You Give?* website: www.wheredoyougive.org and invite students to check it out at home.
- Explain to students that the purpose of this session is not to convince them that they should give *tzedakah*. Hopefully they already understand the importance of the *mitzvah* of giving *tzedakah*. Rather, this lesson takes the next step: Once we have decided to give *tzedakah*, how do we decide where to give?

Facilitator's Note: If your students need to review the concept of *tzedakah* more generally, or the notion that giving *tzedakah* is an obligation, consider including a short discussion of Deuteronomy 15:7-11, the biblical basis for the mitzvah of *tzedakah*. You can find the text and access a printer-friendly version here:

<http://on1foot.org/text/deuteronomy-15-7-11>

2. WOULD YOU RATHER? (20 MINUTES)

a. Explain to students that they are going to play a game called “Would You Rather?” They will be presented with two options for where to give *tzedakah*, and they need to choose which one they would rather give to. If they choose the first, they will stand on one side of the room, and if they choose the second, they will stand on the other side of the room. They must choose a side to stand on; they cannot stand in the middle. Explain that after students have chosen where to stand, you will ask a few volunteers from each side to explain why they chose that side. If students are persuaded to change their decision based on anything that is said, they can move to the other side of the room. Remind students to think for themselves and to switch sides only if they are really compelled by their classmates’ explanations.

Option: You can add a twist to the game by asking students if their answers would change depending on how much money they were giving. For example, “If you were giving \$10, which would you choose? If you were giving \$1,000 which would you choose?”

b. Choose 3-5 questions, depending on how much time you have. “Would You Rather?” questions are provided at the end of this lesson plan.

c. The questions highlight different categories that we prioritize when we decide where to give *tzedakah*; for example: local vs. global, Jewish vs. non-Jewish, greater vs. lesser need, friends/family vs. others, direct service vs. root causes, or one issue (e.g., hunger, education, the environment, health) vs. another issue. As students explain their decisions, write down on the chart paper or the whiteboard the key words that students use to describe priorities and categories of giving.

d. Invite students to reflect on what their priorities are when deciding where to give. Ask them if they can draw any general rules based on their answers to the different scenarios. For example, “I always prefer to give to Jews before non-Jews.” Or, “I think hunger is very important and always prioritize that issue.” Or, “It kind of depends who’s asking—I don’t have a clear set of guidelines.” If students can arrive at general rules or guidelines for prioritizing, encourage them to articulate why these are their priorities. Refer back to the key words you recorded as relevant.

e. Tell students that this quiz is available online at www.wheredoyougive.org/get_inspired/would_you_rather. Encourage them to take the quiz online and to encourage their friends and family to do the same.

3. TEXT STUDY: BAVA METZIA (15 MINUTES)

a. Explain to students that Jewish communities have been debating the question of how to decide where to give for over 2,000 years and that the students’ conversation today is part of that debate. Tell students that they are going to look at one of the earliest voices in the debate, a statement from Rabbi Yosef that dates back to the 4th century.

b. Option 1: Chavruta

Ask students to learn the text in *chavruta* (with a partner), using the discussion questions provided. Do a quick check-in as a full group by taking a few responses to the question: “Do you agree or disagree with the *tzedakah* priorities expressed in this text? Why?”

Option 2: Full Group

Alternatively, you can study the text as a whole group. Invite one student to read the text aloud. Then use the discussion questions provided with the text to guide the group conversation.

For either option, consider using the graphic organizer of concentric circles to help students understand the priorities suggested by the text. In this model, write the prioritized group in the inner circle and the other group in the outer circle. For example:



c. Ask students to write their own version of this text in which they articulate potential recipients and which ones should be prioritized. For example, “Leora teaches: When you give *tzedakah* and have to choose between: protecting the environment and protecting people, protect people first; hunger and homelessness, hunger comes first; etc.” Invite your students to post their versions of the text at www.wheredoyougive.org/post/52.

4. CHANUKAH CANDLE-LIGHTING RITUAL (3 MINUTES)

a. If appropriate for your class, conclude the session with the lighting of the Chanukah candles. After the traditional blessings, consider adding the following intentional statement:

As we gather by the light of the Chanukah candles, we are thankful for the many blessings and gifts in our lives. We commit to giving tzedakah so that others may also enjoy these blessings and gifts. May we continue to have the courage to give generously and the wisdom and patience to give responsibly.

5. CONCLUSION (2 MINUTES)

a. Summarize the session for students by highlighting how difficult it can be to make choices about where we give *tzedakah*.

b. Remind students that this discussion was in the context of designating one night of Chanukah as a night for giving *tzedakah*. Explain that their parents will receive a letter about this activity and encourage them to choose a night of Chanukah on which to discuss and decide, as a family, where to give *tzedakah*.

Facilitator’s Note: *Decide how you would like to share the letter with families (sending a hard copy home with students, e-mailing it as part of your daily or weekly communication, etc.). If you choose to send the letter home with students, make sure to remind them to share it with their families.*

c. Consider asking students to report back to the class about their families’ conversations and decisions about where to give *tzedakah*.

WOULD YOU RATHER?

1. **Would you rather give to:**
 - a. An organization that fights poverty?

OR

 - b. An organization that protects the environment?

2. **Would you rather give to:**
 - a. An organization that helps homeless people in your city?

OR

 - b. An organization that helps homeless people in Israel?

3. **Would you rather give to:**
 - a. An organization that sends doctors to clinics in villages in India to perform surgery and train health workers?

OR

 - b. A local clinic that provides medical care to low-income residents of your city?

4. **Would you rather give to:**
 - a. Your local public library, which runs a program to help low-income elementary school students improve their reading and writing?

OR

 - b. Your synagogue's scholarship fund, which helps Jewish students in your community go to Hebrew school, day school or Jewish summer camp?

5. **Would you rather give to:**
 - a. An organization that fights hunger by providing people with hot meals at a soup kitchen?

OR

 - b. An organization that fights hunger by teaching people job skills so that they can get better jobs?

6. **Would you rather give to:**
 - a. An organization that provides tutors for low-income high school students in math.

OR

 - b. An organization that tries to convince the government to give more money to public high school math programs.

7. **Would you rather give to:**
 - a. Your cousin who is participating in a walk-a-thon to raise money for cancer research?

OR

 - b. An organization that runs a camp for children with cancer?

8. **Would you rather give to:**
 - a. An organization that provides new sports equipment to children who live in the slums in Kenya?

OR

 - b. Your friend who is raising money for new uniforms for his/her basketball team?

Got Gelt? A Conversation about Giving in this Season of Receiving Text Study—Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 71A

Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 71a

Rabbi Yosef taught [about the verse in the Torah that says]: “If you lend money to any of my people that are poor with you.”¹ [This verse teaches that if you have to choose between:]

- a Jew and a non-Jew, give to the Jew first;
- a poor person and a rich person, give to the poor person first;
- a poor relative and poor people in your town, give to your poor relative first;
- poor people in your city and poor people in another city, give to the poor people of your own town first.

¹Exodus 22:24.

תלמוד בבלי בבא מציעא עא:א

דתני רבי יוסף: “אם כסף תלוה את עמי את העני עמו.”¹

- עמי ונכרי, עמי קודם.
- עני ועשיר, עני קודם.
- ענייה ועניי עירך, ענייה קודמין.
- עניי עירך ועניי עיר אחרת, עניי עירך קודמין.

¹שמות כב:כד.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The text lays out four pairs of people who need financial help. What are the four pairs and, in each case, which of the two people should be prioritized?
- Why might “a rich person” need financial help?
- Do you think that these four statements are listed in order of priority (that is, supporting Jews anywhere should always come before supporting poor people in your city) or that they are individual statements that aren’t meant to relate to one another? Why do you read the text in that way?
- Do you agree or disagree with these statements of priority? Why?

